

MEMORANDUM

NOTE DE SERVICE

020718

TO A File
C.c. Stuart Beaty

FROM DE John Dwyer
Policy Analyst

SECURITY - CLASSIFICATION - DE SÉCURITÉ
OUR FILE / NOTRE RÉFÉRENCE H31381-HQ; 1386-1; 1020-6
YOUR FILE / VOTRE RÉFÉRENCE
DATE October 6, 1989

SUBJECT Chris Brown and Environmental Sensitivity
OBJET

Chris called, very upset, about the proposed meeting between Clinical Ecologists and Allergists/Immunologists. He has two problems:

1. His concern is not a medical one, it is one involving the basic dignity and worth of the individual. He feels that his experience, and those of others who suffer from sensitivities, is being ignored. He is extremely frustrated by an officialdom (CHRC included) that seems to want "proof" of what he experiences and thereby turn the question into a medical one. At the least, he believes that the experiences of the environmentally sensitive have to be accepted as real and legitimate and not discounted as being imaginary unless there is proof that that is so. In other words, the onus is on the medical community (and Health and Welfare) to show environmental sensitivity is a psychological problem if it is to make that claim. Moreover, they must recognize its existence. (He referred to a recent television interview with a Health and Welfare spokesperson who claimed that nobody gets ill from pesticides present in fruits and vegetables.)
2. The debate does not include those who are themselves most intimately involved: the environmentally sensitive. The two parties do not and cannot represent their interests; in fact, they have their own vested interests that run counter to those who suffer from the syndrome.

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I tried to express the idea that the recognition of a person's experience as real had economic consequences and therefore could not be entirely divorced from the medical question. He was not impressed with this and saw in it another example of the Commission making a medical issue out of a human rights issue. Moreover, he was upset with the implication that recognizing his experience as real was a first step, and not a given. He explained quite powerfully the effect that denying an individual's experiences as legitimate have on a person.

I had to agree in principle that representatives of the affected groups should be party to discussions concerning them and hoped that follow-up process might provide for this. (I did not, but feel we might when we next contact Losos, suggest that they be included in the current discussions.) I agreed to call the President of the Human Ecology Foundation to get his views (Ed Lowans 519-941-6499). Mr. Lowans made the same point about the need for someone to speak on their behalf. I said I would see what I could do. I took the opportunity to talk about the Foundation and environmental sensitivity generally with Mr. Lowans. He said that the Foundation, the largest self-help, service-oriented group representing the environmentally sensitive, had 1200 families as members. He also said that a survey showed that clinical ecologists had dealt with 30,000 different patients over the last five years. Lastly, it has been estimated that 10% of the population suffers from Epstein-Barr syndrome. These are indications that the problem is not all that rare.